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ART, HANDICRAFT AND EDUCATION

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By
W. R. LETHABY



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ART, HANDICRAFT AND EDUCATION

The following are two short papers by the late W. R. Lethaby which we are glad to be able to reprint here. They contain material which will need saying over and over again for many years to come, if education and beauty are to have a real influence on life and civilisation and not be considered, as is too often the case at present, a matter of private culture. The love of order and seemliness must have its beginnings in the school and in the home.

The first paper on "THE PLACE OF ART IN EDUCATION," was originally published on 27th September, 1916, in the "Teacher's World"; the second on "EDUCATION, ART AND BEAUTY," was read before a Conference of the P.N.E.U. on 4th July, 1916, and was published in the "Parents' Review" for July of that year.

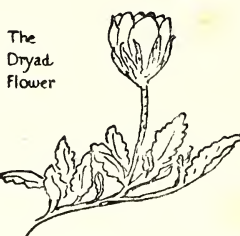
Following the teaching of Ruskin and Morris, no one has done more in recent years to carry on the precepts they inculcated than W. R. Lethaby. If you wish to do your share, you ought to make these two Essays the basis of your practice and thus ensure your school becoming a centre of real civilisation. Do not forget the old verse:—

"If everyone his own door swept, the village would be clean."

Ruskin's teaching has been very ably summed up by Mr. Lethaby in a paper written by him for the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, entitled "Ruskin—Defeat or Victory." This has been reprinted in a small volume of his Essays—"Form in Civilisation—Collected Papers on Art and Labour"—which was published by the Oxford University Press in 1922 (price 3/6). We make no apology for quoting what he has summed up as follows:—

- 1. Art is not a luxury, it is an essential element in all right work. "Industry without art is brutality; life without industry is guilt." True work is the highest mode of life.*

2. *Science is not properly an endless heaping up of "facts," regardless of form and direction; choice is involved; it should be wisdom and service.*
3. *Economics called political need not be identified with a theory of bank balances regardless of who holds the cheque books, and what the cheques are drawn for. A reasonable system of economics would be a doctrine of wise production and beneficent distribution. "There is no wealth but life." The "orthodox" economists who had forgotten life, who never heard of quality in workmanship, and neglected even to foresee war, nearly burst themselves with rage at such simple utterances.*
4. *Education need not necessarily be conceived as an introduction to the competitive scramble, it might be a tempering of the human spirit.*
5. *An artist, poet, or musician is not properly an acrobat engaged in showing off, his proper office is to teach and inspire.*
6. *The land is not a mine for exploitation and a dumping heap for refuse, but it is our garden home.*
7. *Property must observe propriety.*
8. *Quality of life is the end of all rational activity.*



THE PLACE OF ART IN EDUCATION

By W. R. LETHABY

ART A NECESSITY.

Art is not a matter of picture exhibitions, or of a few statues dumped down in our towns, but art is all worthy work—gardening, bootmaking, building, and sometimes, perhaps, picture-painting, too. Thus considered, art is one of the great primary necessities of civilisation. Indeed, the Form of Civilisation is Art, as its Spirit should be Religion. We are sometimes told that character is the end of education, and, of course, character is another of the words (rightly interpreted) that can be made to cover all we want, but the subject of State Education would be more truly explained as Civilisation—the promotion of a type of civilisation worthy to persist and prevail. For myself I should not object if the end of education were defined as art—art rightly understood—the art of living and doing. Education then is, and must always be, concerned with Civilisation, Character, Art. If the following more practical words are commonplaces—for of course everything has been said and most things have been done—still I do not know anywhere where the Need for Beauty is set out shortly as a doctrine.

THE NEEDS OF CIVILISATION.

Well disciplined minds and bodies are required for building up a fine civilisation. Our education has to aim at producing a flowering time in history. We have not only to keep up the level of existence, but to surpass ourselves. There are various types of discipline and many different ways of appealing to different minds. Some young people love stories or books, some love doing and making, some love adventure, scouting, and many love drawing. These and other such instincts or motives must be fostered and made to contribute to the nurture of character just as we make use of the play instinct for the sake of health, adaptability, and quickness. Instincts such as emulation, exploration, imitation, collecting, patriotism, love

of Nature, and love of beauty are present in various degrees in most souls, and a fully conscious system of education would make use of them all. Patriotism would be fostered as love of home and neighbourhood, it would be fed with local history, and inclined towards a worthy view of civic life. The instinct toward experiment and research needs to be stimulated in all minds, for this is the way to produce a due proportion of discoverers, inventors, and men of initiative. The sense of tidiness, order, beauty has also to be aroused.

BEAUTY AND EFFICIENCY.

Delight in beauty is not a vague and ornamental quality, but it is an essential faculty of the properly equipped judgment. It is as impossible, of course, to say exactly what will be thought beautiful as what will be thought valuable or lovable, but this may be said: Beauty involves fitness, order, efficiency and rightness in all our work. It is not merely a question of poetry and paintings, but of shops, factories, housekeeping, town building, and the organisation of the great public services. Beauty is not ornamentation—indeed Beauty often ends where ornament begins—it is best thought of as perfect fitness for a fine purpose. The whole educational apparatus of our schools has to be criticised and overhauled from this point of view of fine fitness. Attractive printing of text-books, vivid clearness in diagrams, beauty in maps, the reasonableness and appropriate finish of furniture, the proper lighting and ventilation of the schoolroom, such things are not only desirable “over and above,” but they are essential and educational in themselves; man does not learn by books alone, and the silent things teach all the time. The arousing effect of good maps is not sufficiently recognised, and too often they have been reduced to dull and depressing diagrams. sometimes one may see, as an advertisement at a railway station, a really effective map of Switzerland, or of the Lake District, or of North Wales and Anglesea; or a relief map of the country served by the railway, which is quite exciting to children. And in the daily Press diagram maps often present facts in a vivid

way which would make a geography book fascinatingly interesting. We need such maps on the walls of our schools and in our books.

In the schoolroom and its furnishings we must aim at cleanliness, attractiveness and perfect order. Maps and diagrams must be carefully arranged and be changed from time to time so as not to get stale, and tidiness should, as far as possible, be exacted from all. A school must be run more or less like a ship, for order is necessary to efficiency, not only in the school, but everywhere in the wider life of the State. An untidy school is uncivilising. Again, in school-exercises the manner must be considered as well as the matter; clear, accurate speech, neat writing, care of books, are necessary. The playground must have no litter. In Switzerland a master sees the pupils enter the school, and the last one in picks up any strewn paper or sticks about the door. Drawing should not be taught only as an exercise, but also as a means of observing beauty.

BEAUTY AS AN END.

Beyond this general aim at tempering minds to quick efficiency much needs to be done in stimulating the beauty-sense of both teachers and pupils; but this should be done indirectly, and must not have the appearance of torturing them with another subject. Beauty must "flow into the soul like a breeze," and what appeals to one mind may repel another. Flowers are always welcome. A short piece of literature properly read, a very little beautiful music, the occasional sight of a picture or fine piece of workmanship, a dozen slides of noble buildings on a magic lantern, a tiny collection of minerals, or medals, or coins, might save some mind tending to everlasting dullness through not knowing what "education" is all about. Many years ago an association was formed for the production of good school pictures, but later these were almost swamped by cheap foreign lithographs. Such school pictures are most valuable, so also are photographs of great buildings, pictures and statues. In making use of these only a few should

be shown at a time, for the interest of change is essential, and they should be hung where they can be properly seen. There is quite an unmeaning custom of hanging pictures out of sight.

Much of this and more is already being done, but it seems desirable to get it understood that the sense of Beauty is essential to productiveness, civic life, and to the well-being of the nation; it is a necessary part of any scheme which can be properly called Education.

Observation seems to show that the sense of Beauty is subject to disease if it is aimed at as mere enjoyment. The delight in Beauty comes as the reward of right work. Beauty is to work what happiness is to conduct.

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LETHABY AS A TEACHER

"A good many of you have been under Lethaby. I know a good many fellows who have been through the college, and whenever I say to any of them: 'Who is the man from whom you learned most?' they always say: 'Lethaby was the man who influenced me most.' It was not that Lethaby showed you how to do anything. He just taught you how to think about the thing, and that is really the difference, as it seems to me, between bad teaching and good teaching. What you have to do is to recognise that it is not a mere matter of receipts, but that it is an attitude of mind towards everything, and that the simplest thing, if it fills its purpose, is the right thing, and the beautiful thing."

George Clausen, R.A., "Some Aspects of Art Education" (an Address given to a Society of Art Teachers and Students).

EDUCATION, WORK AND BEAUTY

By W. R. LETHABY

It would be absurd for me to dare to talk of education in the ordinary sense. I ought, however, from the mere accident of my experience, to be a sort of half authority on education for *work*, and it is of this I am to speak to you : Education, Work and Beauty. As I look around on the present discontents I seem to see one leading mistake,—leading to betray. We too readily roll along the ruts made by custom without considering where the ruts lead, and without noticing perhaps that we may roll most easily when the course is downwards. There is an old maxim, I believe, that education must be related to policy, but so far as I know education outruns the policy. It ever tends to become an ornamental abstract thing, *Education*, and not to be seen as an introduction to work, and an apprenticeship to life. My rough idea is this: All that traditional body of custom we call education has to be re-cast in reference to a policy of civic idealism, productiveness and beauty : the storing up of a great reservoir of national spirit from which we may draw in time of need and not find it a broken cistern.

Directly we speak of education with a view to production we are likely to be met with a flood of eloquence on the “humanities,” as if work were not the most human thing of all, and as if the donnish view of life could or should be given to sailors and agricultural labourers and craftsmen, who live near to things rather than to the curse of books. Why are the “humanists” so superior to humanity? There are in truth many types of culture, the glory of the seaman and shepherd and craftsman is of one kind, and the glory of the literary gentleman and the artist is another. There are bodies celestial and bodies terrestrial, and we have to train for diversities of gifts and varieties of service from the very beginning. Surely the humanities need not be identified with sterility, and the humanist must be induced to *produce* till he goes to heaven, where he may be content to *be*. We know all the rigmarole about the discipline of compulsory Greek, but there are many

types of discipline in life, and there is a danger that what is called *discipline* may be most valued as *differentiation*. Education of a too literary character may become a mere ceremonial institution, and like the top-hat be valued as the ticket of a class. We must educate for manhood, work and service, for the way of health, the ambition to do, and the love of beauty. We must aim at making the way plain for the growth of strong souls and their gathering together in a great civilisation. We have to frame an ideal of life, and endeavour to induce a flowing tide in our affairs.

The period of stagnation, of hoping that the world would last *just as it was forever*, is past. We have to adventure afresh and set up in some degree a worship of work, or rather an understanding that worthy work is worship. We must dare to set up a national ideal of our own which we will pursue in full self-confidence. We are not a modest people, but yet there are deep causes which lead to the sapping of our national confidence. It is not that our way would ever be better than the way of others absolutely, but that it is the better way for us. Looking in on myself, I see that a large part of my admiration for that which is foreign comes from pride in having been abroad. When a person remarks: "Canterbury Cathedral is fine," it is nice to say: "Yes, but do you know Sens, and Senlis and Soissons?" The worship of the foreign to the destruction of our own is really a dangerous national characteristic of which many clear-seeing writers like Ascham and Holinshed have warned us. The cherishing of our own is a method necessary to survival. We undervalue our native prophets to follow after ill-understood strangers. We were far more interested, for instance, in Eucken than in Matthew Arnold and Ruskin. I read Ruskin for years with delight, but with a sort of amused contempt for such works as "Our Fathers have told us," "Proserpina," and the rest, for the teaching was obviously not exact, complete and systematic. I could not see that what Ruskin was after was spirit-formation, not the administering of hard pills of "fact," raw, abstract, confusing, and in the end, I believe, destructive. Ruskin saw that education was soul-

making. We all see that now, don't we? Or at least we read books about the souls of peoples, but possibly we still think England is different and doesn't need one.

If we look to the policy, education will almost take care of itself. But education without policy must produce anarchy, and even stultification. The policy is to aim at bringing about a high tide of civilisation, a flowering time of culture. (It is curious, by the way, that, along with so many other valuable things, we have allowed this word culture to be practically annexed by another, Power, although it is to be found on nearly every other page of Matthew Arnold's works, and in an English dictionary 150 years old I find: "Culture, good education. From the French.") To bring about this high tide we have to set up great ambitions, ambitions to know our own literature, Celtic and Saxon, mediæval and modern, better than the scholars of any other country know it; ambitions to bring back a national type of music that shall be the peer of any other in Europe; ambitions to make our towns as good, even as splendid, as any in the world; ambitions to preserve the natural loveliness of our country, even ambitions to improve common speech and common cooking.

To this end the absurd gap between what is called Education and Life must be closed, a gap so great that there is hardly any passing from the one to the other. This is already being done in many ways, especially by the noble work of the Elementary School Teachers in trying to find employments for those leaving school. And here I must wedge in the remark that we have to produce better types of employment.

Is it necessary there should be such a gap between "school books" and books proper? Our method of education is still, in fact, of an early mediæval type, conditioned by a dearth of books. The relations between what I may call Rote education, Reference education and Research education are nowhere, so far as I know, laid down. Rote can do things that nothing else can; it should be used, for instance, in teaching a standard English speech and in getting rid of the horrors of Cockney.

By what I am calling (for the sake of the three R's), Reference education, I want to suggest that a practical introduction to real books should be brought about in even Elementary Schools: the use, for instance, of Encyclopædia, Dictionary, History and Compendium of Literature. Every pupil should take out with him into the world some half-dozen cheap and compact books of reference, not dis-used school books, but real books to be used, a stock-in-trade for the business of life. It is commonplace enough that some teaching should be experimental, but we need to go much farther. In every higher school and college some real research work should be going on, not pretences at the method, but investigation and record at the margin of things. Oxford should be doing a corpus of British inscriptions. Liverpool should be doing a map of the world an acre big and so on. The universities must teach by doing.

Education has need to come out of school to do things, we need better agriculture, better building, more tidy railways, better cooking. There is not much good in knowing *about* things, we want the things themselves. It is better to have a living literature than to know all about style.

In art this theorising about style kills all vitality, and I fancy it must be the same with the wonderful literary discipline which knows all about style. *The only art is doing*: it is the adventure that counts.

Education is an apprenticeship to life, and compulsory State education is really a State religion, a religion which, on the sanction of the State, must teach honesty, courage, quickness, service, cleanliness, health, ambition; a preparatory middle religion which shall not hesitate to say "We, as City and State, *require* these things." I know it is horrid, we had hoped to make all education of the twice tuppence is fourpence type, with a little chemistry thrown in, but the thing has *broken down* and the nation must venture on spirit forming. Take care of the spirit and the pence will take care of themselves. The Spirit and Work and Beauty, that is what we have to educate for.

We all agree, doubtless, in desiring a finer type of civilisation. Even when men like Wm. Morris and Edward Carpenter scoff at the word, they, too, mean the same thing. Indeed, one of the frightful difficulties of getting anything clearly said is this: every word has been made to mean something else, especially the words education and art. The civilisation, which we all agree, in desiring for ourselves and for England, is a many-sided thing concerned with conduct, with knowledge, and with the arts, all of which interpenetrate, for *these three are one*. Art is all productive work, action, labour, and as such it is evidently a function of conduct and life. In fact, artists see that work is the really fundamental drill of life, and that the weakness of all mere thinkers is that they have so little to think about. Instead of producing, they talk, and very much talk is a mere churning a vacuum. If they had rendered their quota in toil they would know the doctrine. Work is health, adventure, life, sanity; work, too, never faileth. It was thought to be a wonderful adumbration of philosophy when William Jones said there should be a conscription for common labour to bring hardness and training into life—a trite truism which every worker has always known in his bones.

Looking frankly at things as they are, and what they lead to, it is plain that we have to reshape our thinking and our institutions. Education must be taken out of its water-tight compartment and be openly and avowedly related to the policy of promoting a noble and orderly civilisation. This can only be done by the conscious and continuous evoking of a national and human spirit, which shall be a deep well of life in us. How dry and withering, as a matter of fact, was most education in our time, at best how static, at worst how terrifying as doors were opened on vistas of darkness.

Education, as I understand it, besides grad-grinding us in the ignorances of the world, and teaching the well-to-do manners for dining-out, and Oxford voice production, has to see to it that all the young people of the nation bank up a great fund of life-stuff to be drawn on in all the future years.

To do this, the *beauty* motive must be much more fully worked. Only the beauty sense allows us to see things in relation to the springs of life; and in the days of stress which are now so plainly in front of us, we must obtain all that may be from all sorts of motives which have power over us—the patriotism motive, the adventure motive, the duty motive, the motives of order and of beauty. Take any of the ordinary stuff taught in schools, such as geography, history, literature: what can be made of value to the spirit in any of them without ruling *principles* and guiding *policies* and sense of *beauty*? Geography must be made to involve *love of the land*, a sense of the romantic beauty and sacredness of our little islands set down in the western sea. In what books or maps do we find this England for the soul? In none that I know of, since the old Venetian edition of Ptolemy, with its lovely blue sea, and the old county maps of Saxon and Speed, and books like Camden, Stow and Drayton's Polyolbion. In saying so, it comes plain to me that the great Elizabethans saw all this three hundred years ago; their books and maps have patriotism, policy and beauty; that, I take it, is the main mystery of their style. If we were taught England like that should we consent to leave it a week longer as a hiring ground for advertisements of toffee and pills? We want really vivid pictures of Roman Britain, Saxon Britain, Britain of the Monasteries and Cathedrals, and the children of every town need to be taught to reverence that town and not to hate it. Thus, perhaps, we might learn the need of town improvement.

So-called history—what good is that, unless we get a beauty value out of it?—a heart-stirring over Bede, and Alfred, and Harold, and Richard, and Drake and Nelson?

Literature—what is the teaching of English literature? Mainly a dreary, damping chatter about style and names and dates, I fancy; but to what good? Has any schoolmaster, or teacher, yet conceived of a British Bible of literature? The books of Arthur, Tristram and Beowulf; a first and second book of English Chronicles; then Psalms, and the Prophets of what England shall be? A Canon of British inspired literature?

This, roughly and in short, is my notion of how our education has to be recast in the light of policy, patriotism and of a national spirit. We have to give up mere beating of time, the going over the higher A.B.C.'s of the universities, and we must induce a flowing tide of production, beauty and life.

Work, Art, Education, are to redeem our towns out of the slovenly wretchedness into which they have fallen, they are to bring us a true civilisation of ordered cities in a beloved country. We all need to join hands for an effort which is essential for survival.

Paper read before the Conference of the Parents' National Educational Union, held in London, 4th July, 1916. Reprinted from the *Parent's Review*, by kind permission.

SOME BOOKS WRITTEN BY W. R. LETHABY

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